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THE LONG ISLAND HOME HAMPER

By H. B. FULLERTON,

Director Agricultural Development, Long Island Railroad Company,
Medford, Long Island.

Up to 1905, I along with others was a consumer belonging to the city flat-dwelling tribe. In 1906 we became producers, in charge of the Long Island Railroad's Experimental Stations, casting our lot with those of the market garden profession.

As soon as the results of our labor reached the salable stage we were confronted with and astounded by the remarkable changes in food undergone during the transmission between the producer and consumer. We gathered peas crisp, vivid in color and of wonderful sweetness; we remembered yellowed, shriveled, flavorless semblances we purchased as flat-dwellers. We gathered sugar corn that lived up to its name to the very limit. We cut lettuce, crisp and with cabbage-like heads of greenish tinted whiteness. We remembered that in the city we were unable to buy at any price corn that had the slightest hint of sweetness; and that the lettuce we obtained was flabby and tough and required foreign mixtures to make it edible. We raised strawberries, large and luscious, as sweet as those wild berries of which poets long have sung. Celery we grew, whose stringless, brittle stalk forced us to use great care in gathering this sweet-flavored appetizer. Cantaloupes and watermelon we grew, of quality so high that we no longer yearned for our youthful days. Mealy potatoes, stringless snap beans and great limas equalling in full those which had long been but a memory.

All these longed-for-by-mankind vegetable foods, with many other varieties we shipped to the city, consigning them to concerns doing business as commission merchants, who had in person or by letter solicited consignments from us and who agreed over the firm's signature to sell our choice and fancy crops at the highest obtainable price and guaranteed to forward immediately proceeds of sales to us, deducting as their commission for transacting the business from $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 10 per cent. Astonishment and indignation were extremely close companions from the moment the first returns came in. Consternation was also in

marked evidence, for bunches of radishes extremely early, carefully selected, washed and honestly bunched beauties, barely returned us enough to pay for the labor of bunching. Big, firm and uniform heads of lettuce did not return the original cost of the package in which they were shipped. Carefully picked, painstakingly selected, firm and perfectly formed tomatoes brought less than the cost of the shipping crate. Occasionally we received notice that the "market was overstocked" or because of "no demand" no returns could be made, and less frequently came the astounding request that we make a remittance of various amounts "to cover the loss sustained" by the commission merchants.

Then in conference we hearked back to the flat-dwelling days when we had bought but sparingly of some items and gone without others because of the extremely high prices demanded, and many of these items were the identical food plants for which we had received little or nothing, or a little less than nothing at times. It was a riddle, but like all riddles capable of solution; it was most emphatically "a condition, not a theory that confronted us," and having learned in our early days that the way to find out was to find out, we made an unannounced self-appointed committee tour of investigation, and in short order discovered in this our very first year as producers, the ever memorable 1906, many weird and startling things connected with the food supply of the city consumers.

We found that the phrase "market price" was a joke or hollow mockery; that it depended not one whit on that only true regulator of price, supply and demand, but rested entirely on the vagaries, the needs or the greed of a very few in whom the speculative tendency was predominant; that concerns soliciting consignments from producers and offering to make covenant with them for the very best prices, and charge for thus acting as agents varying commissions running from 5 to 10 per cent; that a very common method of procedure was to turn the producer's goods over to one or more purely fictitious firms, sometimes consisting of wives or children of the alleged commission merchants. This apparently sufficed to satisfy all mental, moral and legal principles, and of course left an unobstructed right-of-way for speculation of the most productive kind.

To the simple-minded non-gambler this seemed to be synonymous with that unsavory practice sometimes pursued by financiers designated as "wash sales." We found that beyond this there stood from

five to seven intermediaries between producers and consumers, who without one dollar of invested capital, having no expenses for rental or clerical assistance, their offices being their hats and their stock-in-trade a lead pencil, were amassing "unearned increment" that yielded them handsome city residences, attractive summer homes, and such luxuries as automobiles and even yachts.

We found out many other things. We found that our crops for which inadequate returns were being made were offered for sale in many cases at a cost so high that only the extremely well-to-do could afford to purchase them. To that great majority, the so-called middle class they must be only occasional luxuries. While to the poor who suffer for their lack, they were the unattainable.

Having solved the problem which since that ever to be remembered year 1906 has been discussed, debated, investigated and conventionized by great minds noted for nation-craft, state-craft and city-craft we returned to our modest market garden home having all fundamentals necessary to solve the riddle, whose only solution was the one word—speculation. Then knowing through personal knowledge and through reading that no law could be enacted to make man honest we naturally concluded that we must eliminate the opportunity for unfair dealing and needless additions to the cost of food, which meant "farm to family fresh."

Here we had the "word," and in a simple crate containing six regulation four-quart boxes of food plant products we delivered the "message." Its name, the "Long Island Home Hamper," followed as a natural sequence; "Long Island," for here the food was raised and the idea evolved; "Home," because it would help to solve the living problem; "Hamper," well, because alliterative phrases roll glibly from the tongue, while leaving their impress on the memory.

The fair price that was set on the home hamper was solved by the square deal method of investigating the selling price in vogue at those little stores whose owners were satisfied to do business on a margin that would cover their needs and leave them an annual surplus for a rainy day and the lessening earning capacity of accumulating years.

The first price set, \$1.50 per hamper, (we paying the delivery charge) has not been changed. To get at the net returns to us for our produce from this price must be deducted the charge made by the Long Island Railroad Company, express service, for hauling a package

weighing from 30 to 35 pounds a distance of 60 miles, and then making wagon delivery throughout New York City or Brooklyn; also there must be deducted the price of the simple regulation crate, six 4-quart boxes, separator and cover, varying between 18 and 19 cents; the cost of the paraffin paper, with which each 4-quart box is lined, and which covers the food and protects it from dust while keeping it fresh and crisp; the cost of the labels, the labor of packing and hauling to the station, two miles away, and the clamps which bind the cover to the "home hamper," nails not being used as clamps are more easily handled by those in charge of the household's most important realm. These "home hampers," shipped about seven o'clock in the morning, are delivered by noon, frequently before, and in ample time for that most important city meal, supper, called by city folks dinner.

The business was started by sending a few home hampers to acquaintances and accompanying it with a letter, in which we frankly said we had evolved the home hamper for the purpose of cutting out food speculation; for the purpose of delivering absolutely fresh vegetables, berries, etc., to the consumer and for the further purpose of securing for the producer a fair and just return for his labor and investment in his farm, his implements, his horses, his seed, his fertility upkeepers and his expenses incidental to picking, packing and marketing his crop. We asked them to investigate and if they felt the home hamper was worth \$1.50 we would be pleased to receive remittance. If on the contrary the home hamper for any reason whatever did not appeal, to accept it with our compliments.

This first shipment proved that we had filled a long-felt want; remittance was promptly received from each recipient, and further we at once received orders from others, averaging three and a third customers from each hamper shipped. We have received many letters running all the way from commendation to fulsome flattery and are advised that we save for the consumer from 70 cents to \$3 per home hamper.

In order to get an absolute check on our findings regarding the superlative array of intermediaries and their super-superlative additions of "unearned increment" we have many times make bulk shipments of items entering into the make-up of the home hamper of specific dates. We were positively stunned to discover that in the wholesale shipments we would net from 6 to 8 cents for the crops, for which when

shipped in the home hamper, we received 98 cents net; so while saving the consumer many hundred per cent, we gain for the producer a difference between 6 cents and 98 cents.

That identically the same objects can be accomplished in other ways is most apparent. Public markets in reality and as well in name have done it and are doing it in many sections of the country. In these markets it is imperative that no one be permitted to obtain a foothold or a stall unless he be producer or the duly authorized local agent of a community of producers. The only true coöperation of producer and consumer is best illustrated by the army and navy stores of England in which producer and consumer alone receive dividends and whose simple constitution or governing factors have proven impregnable to all assaults.

The Long Island Home Hamper has had no strings attached to it and has been adopted in many sections of the United States, the occasional letters received by us demonstrating that it works out satisfactorily in any climate and under any conditions of humankind.